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April 28, 2005

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
OFFICE OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS

Name of Case: Worker Appeal

Date of Filing: September 24, 2004

Case No.: TIA-0219

XXXXXXXXXXXXX (the Applicant) applied to the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Worker Advocacy (OWA) for DOE assistance in filing for state workers' compensation benefits for her late husband (the Worker). The OWA referred the application to an independent Physician Panel (the Physician Panel and the Panel), which determined that the Applicant's illness was not related to his work at the DOE. The OWA accepted the Panel's determination, and the Applicant filed an Appeal with the DOE's Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA), challenging the Panel's determination. As explained below, we have concluded that the Appeal should be denied.

*I. Background*

*A. The Relevant Statute and Regulations*

The Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000 as amended (the Act) concerns workers involved in various ways with the nation's atomic weapons program. See 42 U.S.C. §§ 7384, 7385. As originally enacted, the Act provided for two programs. Subpart B established a Department of Labor (DOL) program providing federal compensation for certain illnesses. See 20 C.F.R. Part 30. Subpart D established a DOE assistance program for DOE contractor employees filing for state workers' compensation benefits. Under the DOE program, an independent physician panel assessed whether a claimed illness or death arose out of and in the course of the worker's employment, and exposure to a toxic substance, at a DOE facility. 42 U.S.C. § 7385o(d)(3); 10 C.F.R. Part 852 (the Physician Panel Rule). The OWA was responsible for this program.

The Physician Panel Rule provided for an appeal process. An applicant could appeal a decision by the OWA not to submit an application to a Physician Panel, a negative determination by a Physician Panel that was accepted by the OWA, and a final decision by the OWA not to accept a Physician Panel determination in favor of an applicant. The instant appeal was filed pursuant to that Section. The Applicant sought review of a negative determination by a Physician Panel that was accepted by the OWA. 10 C.F.R. § 852.18(a) (2).

While the Applicant's appeal was pending, Congress repealed Subpart D. Ronald W. Reagan Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005, Pub. L. No. 108-375 (October 28, 2004) (the Authorization Act). Congress added a new subpart to the Act, Subpart E, which establishes a DOL workers' compensation program for DOE contractor employees. Under Subpart E, all Subpart D claims will be considered as Subpart E claims. *Id.* § 3681(g). In addition, under Subpart E, an applicant is deemed to have an illness related to a workplace toxic exposure at DOE if the applicant received a positive determination under Subpart B. *Id.* § 3675(a).

During the transition period, in which DOL sets up the Subpart E program, OHA continues to process appeals of negative OWA determinations.

## B. Procedural Background

The Worker was employed as a janitor, laborer, maintenance mechanic, and mailroom worker at the Savannah River Site (the plant). He worked at the plant for approximately 18 years, intermittently from 1962 to 1983.

The Applicant filed an application with the OWA requesting physician panel review of the Worker's throat mass, severe dilated congestive cardiomyopathy and renal insufficiency. The Applicant alleges that the Worker's conditions were caused by exposures to toxic and hazardous material during the course of the Worker's employment at the Plant.

The Physician Panel rendered negative determination for all of the claimed illnesses. The Panel found that there was no evidence of a throat mass and insufficient evidence linking workplace exposures to the Worker's other conditions. The OWA accepted the determination, and the Applicant filed the instant appeal.

In her appeal, the Applicant contends that (i) the record lacks exposure records for at least one year, and employment records for 1952, and (ii) the record contains evidence that the Worker had the sensation of a throat mass. See Applicant's Appeal Letter.

## *II. Analysis*

Under the Physician Panel Rule, independent physicians rendered an opinion whether a claimed illness was related to exposure to toxic substances during employment at a DOE facility. The Rule required that the Panel address each claimed illness, make a finding whether that illness was related to toxic exposure at the DOE site, and state the basis for that finding. 10 C.F.R. § 852.12. The Rule required that the Panel's determination be based on "whether it is at least as likely as not that exposure to a toxic substance" at DOE "was a significant factor in aggravating, contributing to or causing the illness." *Id.* § 852.8.

The Applicant's arguments do not indicate OWA or Panel error. In her application, the Applicant claimed that the Worker was employed from 1962 to 1991, and the records contains exposure records for that period, see Record at \_\_\_\_\_. If the Applicant wishes to claim employment during prior years, she should contact the DOL on how to proceed. Finally, the Applicant's argument that the Worker had a sensation of a throat mass does not indicate Panel error. The Panel acknowledged that the Worker reported the sensation, but found that the record lacked evidence that he actually had a throat mass. The Applicant has not alleged, let alone demonstrated, Panel error on that issue.

As the foregoing indicates, the appeal should be denied. In compliance with Subpart E, the claim will be transferred to the DOL for review. The DOL is in the process of developing procedures for evaluating and issuing decisions on these claims. OHA's denial of this claim does not purport to dispose of or in any way prejudice the DOL's review of the claim under Subpart E.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED THAT:

- (1) The Appeal filed in Worker Advocacy, Case No. TIA-0219, be, and hereby is denied.

- (2) This denial pertains only to the DOE claim and not to the DOL's review of this claim under Subpart E.
- (3) This is a final order of the Department of Energy.

George B. Breznay  
Director  
Office of Hearings and Appeals

Date: April 28, 2005